M Conundrums!

Conundrums!

Part One: M Conundrums!

Chapter 1 - The Start of Conundrum

Laiken was sitting there on his couch, passed out and watching something stupid on TV.
“Arg! You will not get me’ dog!” The pirates(?) exclaimed. Laiken’s mind was wandering off to who-knows-where and he may just well keel over dead if not for some sort of interruption. Alas, one came.

The TV suddenly turned blue and a faint static noise played that emphasized the hum of his old CRT. Some dude with an indescribable appearance but an odd mustache started narrating some weird commercial for this “Pebi Park”. This was more than enough to wake Laiken. *What in the world is Pebi Park?*

As the ad went on, it was increasingly obvious that *this was no regular park*. Pebi, the soda brand exclusively sold in Dogland and the neighboring towns that everyone and their great grandmother goes nuts about, is opening up an amusement park! Although, what kind of soda company franchises out into the circus business? Hey, who’s Laiken to judge? In a small, mischievous and awkward place like Dogland, any new business opening up is a deal and half. Remember the mass euphoria and parties that happened when that flower shop opened last summer?

Laiken got a post-it note from his handy note container on the coffee table on the side of his couch and scribbled down the address, *“735 Dogland Ave. Dogland, Louisiana”* and dashed out to his garage where his 2006 Honda Civic resides. He hit 2 tables in the hallway despite having no tables in the 2 spots he hit (suspicious). He opened the indoor garage door with a loud CREAK, and pressed the cool button that automatically opened the outdoor garage door. He opened those car doors, got in those car doors, put the key in the ignition and turned it sideways, closed those car doors, headed out the garage and closed the door behind him.

The drive there was filled with a whole lot of nothing, *yet something*. He passed by Not Kaysen, although neither acknowledged each other. There was a strangely high amount of roadkill just chilling on the road, and they look like they kind of just dropped dead without anyone hitting it because they look completely unphased. Needless to say, the strange road trip was only the beginning of the madness that will unfold at Pebi Park.

Chapter 2 - Pebi Park

Laiken drove down a narrow, forest-covered, one way road of severely cracked asphalt that rumbled underneath his tires. Alas, the forest came to an abrupt stop and before Laiken was an extremely odd place. Laiken parked in a small, pathetic 8-car parking lot that awkwardly protruded from the small road. Laiken noticed that the road kept going *into the entrance of the park* and turned into a sidewalk-esque path inside the park. Odd, however, the rest of the park was even stranger.

The park is surrounded by thick, tall, bright, unpainted plywood fences with a gap for an entrance. The entrance is covered by a massive ornate blue arch covered in lights, red highlights, and a big light-blue text “PEBI PARK!” On the top with the letters sort of just floating. There’s no ticket booth. It is covered by dense forest on all sides but one, with the east side being a MASSIVE empty field with the edges being the same forest that goes on just about as far as the eye can see with one lonely water tower in the top-left corner. The park that Laiken can see is only a couple little rides far apart from each other, with tons of twisting, winding paths that go nowhere. There’s only a single gender-neutral bathroom near the entrance. There’s a couple concession stands, most of which being popcorn and hotdogs and stuff of the like.

Laiken slowly walked through the absurd arch, feeling a wave of dread the moment he went past the fence. On the left side of the path in the immediate entrance was a hotdog stand, and the right has that same strange dilapidated *bathroom*. *This seems like a*

setup, but I'll give it the benefit of the doubt. Laiken felt his stomach growl, that awful rumbling feeling and groaning sound. At that moment, Laiken remembered he hadn't eaten anything in 2 days, too focused on who-knows-what. *Maybe I'd get a quick hotdog and go to a restaurant when/if I get out of here.*

Laiken cautiously approached the hotdog stand. It looks like a repurposed beach ice cream stand, with "ICE CREAM!" Scratched out and overlaid with a paper with a hotdog design printed on it like wallpaper. The stand is operated by this tall, skinny figure with milk-white skin with an equally white short-sleeved turtleneck with thin pink stripes, and slightly less white sweatpants. He has a poorly shaved beard and a black mullet with a cartoonishly large chef's hat.

Laiken, already slightly uneasy from the stand operator's not exactly approachable look, asked "Uh, one hotdog, please…! No condiments, though, I don't trust you not to lace it with anything." Hotdog Guy (that's his canon name now) says in a voice that's a mix between a British narrator and a 16-year-old boy "One hotdog, no condiments, coming right up! Or down, depending on what strikes your fancy!"

Hotdog Guy just kind of shuffles his hands around behind the booth, sounds of glass hitting and things falling in some strange liquid that unmistakably watered down mustard left and right, until, exactly 38 seconds later, he comes back with a plain yet perfect-looking hotdog in a cardboard tray with a white and red checkerboard pattern. Laiken says, "uh… Thanks?"

”You’re welcome!” Hotdog guy says, puffing out his chest slightly, the buttons on his shirt trying not to spontaneously pop off.
“Wait, you never told me how much I owe!” Laiken politely interrupted.
”Why, you’re my first customer! You deserve this one on the house!” He answered before waving Laiken away.

Laiken took the hotdog and was about to eat, but there’s a problem. His bladder suddenly pulls all emergency precautions and Laiken needs to pee, ***BAD***. Laiken marches over to the bathroom with the urine of a thousand suns singing his waist.

The bathroom’s walls and roof are made of steel sheets and held together by willpower and a dream. The porcelain urinals, toilets, and sink are in perfect condition and extremely shiny without a single stain or piece of crust to their names. The stall doors are hanging on by a thread. The pipes on the urinals and in the back of the toilets and sinks are extremely corroded and have seen better days.

Laiken goes to the south-most urinal (the urinal of kings) and unzips. There, at that moment, something unexplainable happens.

Laiken has his right hand slightly stretched out with the hotdog he got firmly clutched. Somehow, the sausage mysteriously gains some sort of power and slips out of his hand upwards. It starts levitating up to just above Laikens forehead, standing upright. The hotdog starts gently spinning and violently spraying grease out of the seams in its skin. And, when I mean violently, I mean **LIKE A**

PRESSURE WASHER. Not before long, every surface of the bathroom: stall walls, urinals, toilets, sinks, mirrors, Laiken; all covered in sticky, slimy grease. Before Laiken can even process what is happening, it's already up to his ankles. Desperately trying not to fall and become a statistic, Laiken darts out of there and runs as fast as he can to the nearest exit (but not the entrance where he came from).

Little does Laiken know, this is *still* but the beginning of his problems, and a hotdog he got from a strange vendor gaining magical powers isn't even the strangest.

Chapter 3 - The Water Park

Laiken's running for his life towards a few knocked down fences on the opposite side of the park (the entrance is no longer available for emergency evacuation for unknown reasons). In the midst of the chaos, Laiken looks back and sees the park manager ignorantly walk over to the bathroom and enter it (strangely, no grease spilled out). Laiken turns back, not wishing to see whatever could possibly happen to them. Immediately after, without warning, Laiken hears a blood curdling screech followed by the bathroom literally exploding into a massive mushroom cloud of grease, blood, agony, and shrapnel of god-knows-what.

Understandably even *more* freaked out, Laiken darts through the hole in the fence which leads to the dumb forest. Swiftly maneuvering through trees and other weird looking vegetation, Laiken finds that the other side of the forest is a… some strange dream-feeling highway? Laiken could've sworn he had never seen this before, despite having been in this exact spot before.

Before him was something odd. The forest just abruptly ends and there's not a single tree to speak of beyond the threshold. There's like a bajillion different winding roads everywhere, two main roads going straight ahead for what seems like forever with useless turn lanes and U-turns that nobody would ever use *everywhere*. There's streetlights, but they're way too far apart to be useful. There's some awkwardly placed Chick fil' A off to the side of the highway, and there's at least 14 cars in its parking lot, so it seems like the strange placement paid off. The forest does keep going on the east side, with the right part of the straight road hugging it,

and buildings just kind of cutting into the forest, leaving weird square holes devoid of trees in it.

Laiken cautiously started walking, still uneasy and covered in weird oil from the hotdog incident. The headlights, the strangely placed restaurants, the buildings cutting through a forest, everything about this feels absolutely *wrong*, like this is a place Laiken should have never found. Laiken notices that one of the strange forest buildings is a water park. Maybe he can make use of today there!

Laiken walks over there. Despite looking and sounding very busy, there's *no* cars at all on any of the roads. His shoes crunch the grass and the blades don't stand back up.

Laiken gets to the park. This time, there's a ticket booth. It's just some big deep blue box that's maybe 8ft X 10ft and a window where you can see the ticket guy, and the window has a hole for cash/card/whatever to get a ticket to get in.

Laiken slowly hands over his card to Ticket Guy, who strangely looks exactly like Hotdog Guy but without the chef's hat and looks like he's been on a caffeine-only diet. Ticket Guy grabs his card with his visibly shaky hand, takes a ***GOOD*** look at it with eyes that scream "I can't be bothered to do this, but I might as well try", and puts it in the card reader. A few moments later, the reader makes a beep that doesn't exactly sound pleased. Ticket Guy hesitates for a second before taking it out. "Sorry, Laiken, the ticket is too expensive," Ticket Guy mumbles before promptly twitching and dropping cold on the dashboard With a loud *THUD*.

His snoring sounds extremely exasperated, Laiken almost feels bad for the poor guy. Although he never gave Laiken his card back, so he deserves a little petty, sympathy-less karma. Laiken just stands there for a second, unsure of what to do, and takes a step back before another weird thing happens.

A guy dressed in what looks like a camouflage war outfit, who's presumably the manager with the name tag that just says "Water Park Manager", kicks the door open *super dramatically*. Ticket Guy does not wake up, and that was **LOUD**. The manager waltzes up over to Ticket Guy and stares him down with a piercing stare that even intimidates Laiken, who, at this point, is just the innocent bystander in an action movie set.

The manager lets out a mumble of disapproval and does a solemn head shake. The manager suddenly goes from sad and disappointed to raging in an instant and points accusingly at Ticket Guy with his hand extended so far his chest winds back a bit. The manager yells with the most enraged and serious voice imaginable, "Wake up or I'll feed you to my sheep!"

Laiken can't help but chuckle a bit at the almost cartoonishly absurd threat. But no, it seems serious as he hesitates for a moment before letting his hand down and waiting for Ticket Guy to give a response. *He's still fast asleep*. "Ugh," the manager groans, "you leave me no choice." He does not hesitate a moment, and suddenly grabs Ticket Guy by the feet and drags him out. Ticket Guy must be the heaviest sleeper on Earth as he's still passed out. Laiken can't see where they go, but he hears the

engine of some car in the far back of the park turn on and drive away, so maybe that's what happened?

Laiken, thinking the coast is clear, and noticing that they left the back door open, decides to grab his credit card back. His still grease-covered shoes squish under the muddy dirt beneath him.

The inside of the booth looks no less absurd than whatever just happened a moment ago. The dashboard where he presumably prints tickets, reads cards, opens/closes the gate, and whatnot, looks like something from the cockpit of a plane. There's a filing cabinet by the doorway full of dumb legal documents that Laiken doesn't understand and just scoffs at. There's Ticket Guy's family pictures, specifically 3 of them, along the wall, and there's a person scribbled out with red Crayon on one of them. There's a lamp that gives Laiken a bad feeling that makes him want to stare at it for 3 weeks in the corner on a coffee table. This is one strange place.

Laiken grabs his card, stuffs it in his pocket, and makes a hasty retreat.

The Big Footnote

M Conundrums!

- “Not Kaysen” mentioned in Chapter 1 is a reference to a character with the same name from No Dog Conundrums and are canonically the same character
- In Chapter 2, the single bathroom is described as gender-neutral, whereas in the actual park design, it has two doors marked male and female despite leading to the same bathroom. Oh, the oxymoron!
- I’m still unsure how I came up with the design for Pebi Park. Maybe it came to me in a dream. I *THINK* It's a mashup of some renaissance fair I went to once a few years ago, a cartoonishly small circus I saw on the news once, and a couple dumb elements I added in, although I genuinely don’t know.
- If you, for whatever reason, need a character list:
    - Laiken
    - The Pirate (the pirate on TV mentioned in Chapter 1)
    - Pebi Man (the guy on the Pebi Park advertisement)
    - Not Kaysen
    - Hotdog Guy
    - Park Manager
    - Ticket Guy
    - Water Park Manager
    - Kaysen
    - Jack
    - Tyson
    - Enzo
- The “strange highway” in chapter 3 is inspired by the weird place the water park resides in in a previous draft of this novel
- The park manager from Chapter 3 was just some “innocent soul” in the original M Conundrums
- Ticket Guy and Hotdog Guy are canonically identical twins. Also, they’re unaware of the other’s existence.